



**Watch Me Grow Daycare
LLC
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Good morning, my name is Nichelle Waddell and the name of my program is Watch Me Grow Daycare located in Stamford. I have been a childcare owner for three years and an educator for 10 years.

It is no secret that there is a childcare crisis in the United States. Countless news stories and articles in papers have highlighted the situation across the country, and the shortage of quality childcare is even more pronounced in Fairfield Counties and Westchester.

Yet Family and Group childcare providers experience persistent housing and zoning barriers that prevent them from starting and maintaining their businesses.

There is a bill that has been introduced the last two years that will enforce and strengthen existing protections for homebase child care businesses. I'm here to talk about the challenges that I faced and encourage you to support this effort.

I appeared before the Stamford Zoning Board of appeals twice before being approved to operate a Group family child care home. I went from being a Family child care home of 6 children to a

Group family Childcare Home which allows me to care for up to 12 children.

The cost of appearing before the Zoning Board was \$1520 each time for a total of \$3,040. I also had to submit a class a two survey to the zoning board which cost a minimum of \$2,600.

Hiring a lawyer was an additional \$9,000 because I had been denied before and my lawyer knew it was going to be difficult to get me approved the second time around. Paying these necessary fees were extremely costly and I am still in the process of paying my legal bill.

The Zoning Board granted my approval but added the condition that I shuttle children to and from my program. Under the current conditions outlined by the zoning board, I've had to turn away 5 families since January.

And as recently as this past Saturday, I had to turn away a family with a three-month-old in dire need of care. I am now in the process of requesting the zoning board to adjust this condition administratively.

If they will not agree to this, I will incur more legal costs from my lawyer and another Zoning Board fee of \$1,520 because I will have to appear before them in March. That will put my zoning board fees alone at \$4,560.

These barriers have meant having to turn away the parents of young children, who are looking to return to work.

Families have come to me before their children were born, looking for a high-quality program for their children. Many mothers have 3 to 6 months before they have return to work. Family childcare educators often meet this need.

Threats of eviction from landlords and unforeseen zoning challenges stop providers from being able to offer consistent care to families who are relying on us, to be able to get to work.

I've spoken with other educators that have been interested in expanding to group family childcare, and have decided against it due to the cost and uncertainty of participating in the Zoning Board process.

Childcare providers are financially struggling to survive after living through the pandemic with the rest of the country. The big difference being, other industries and businesses throughout the country have received federal, state and local support and they are now recovering and in some cases thriving. We are not, we need help. Where will all the infants and children go if we are forced out of business due to the economic crisis we are facing? What will become of Connecticut's childcare care industry, we all need to care about our children.